

9th-10th GRADE ACTION PLAN

10 Rules for Making Sure You Are on Track to College

- 1. Courses:** Stick with the academic solids — English, History/Social Studies, Science, Math, and Foreign Language. Add other courses as your schedule permits, but under NO CIRCUMSTANCES trade an "academic" subject for a "soft" subject, e.g. Band.
- 2. Rigor:** Challenge yourself, but don't overwhelm yourself. For most students, this means 3 of the 5 academic solids will be at an advanced level and the others will be at a standard level.
- 3. Extracurriculars:** Sign up and participate actively in at least 3 extracurricular activities/hobbies — dance, music, sports, clubs, church, community organizations, etc. Paid work is fine too. You should have a full calendar after school! By the end of 10th grade, you should be involved in activities for which you have a passion and where you will have opportunities for leadership and noteworthy achievement.
- 4. Summers:** Use your summers well. Do something that develops you. In grades 9 and 10, your choices may be more limited, but that only means that you get a chance to exhibit some initiative. At the very least, you should be able to report that you spent at least 4 weeks of the summer doing more than hanging out at the beach.
- 5. SAT Subject Tests:** The College Board is no longer offering these in the United States, and for the time being, you no longer need to plan on taking these.
- 6. PSAT:** If your school offers you the opportunity to take a PSAT test, do it! This is good practice for the tests you will need to take in your 11th grade year. Use your results to give you insight about what kind of test preparation you should pursue.
- 7. Friends:** Choose friends who are supportive, interesting or accomplished, and unlikely to get you in trouble. You will rise or fall together!
- 8. Relationships with Key Adults:** Develop your skills at building relationships with key adults, especially teachers and your school counselor — they will be your recommenders. Having a positive history together helps!
- 9. Career and College Exploration:** Educate yourself about possible careers and colleges. Take an online career interest inventory and find out more about the careers suggested for you. Visit colleges with your family while on vacation or virtually.
- 10. Get Help:** If things aren't going well (for you personally, at home, or at school), GET HELP sooner rather than later. There is no shame in asking for help. Don't wait until something really bad happens... avoid the total meltdown!

11th-12th GRADE ACTION PLAN

10 *Rules for Making Sure You Stay Sane Through the College Admission Process*

- 1. Challenge yourself academically.** Take the most rigorous schedule you can manage that includes the 5 core academic subjects (English, Foreign Language, Math, Science, History/Social Studies). Rigor means that you are taking some courses at an advanced level – honors, AP, IB, or Dual Enrollment. Your grades in 11th and 12th grade should be your best ever.
- 2. Learn effective time management.** Make the jump from good study habits to good overall time management. A time-block schedule that allocates the 168 hours of your week works well for many students. (Google “time blocking” to see how that works.)
- 3. Make a plan for preparing for and taking your standardized tests.** If you want to maximize your opportunities at selective colleges, you will want to have taken the ACT or SAT by the end of junior year, and you should budget time to retake as well.
- 4. Choose where you are going to make your mark outside the classroom.** For your activities, you will need to show impact. In order to have impact, you need to be deeply involved in something. Pick 2-3 activities outside the classroom and let everything else go. Really.
- 5. Develop a plan for your summer.** Ideally it will allow you to have a “capstone/cherry on top” experience to add to your credentials.
- 6. Develop solid relationships with at least 2 teachers and your school-based college counselor.** These should be teachers who could be your recommenders for college. Expect to start working with your school-based counselor sometime during the 2nd semester of 11th grade — they will be writing a recommendation for you as well.
- 7. Nail down a realistic college list sooner rather than later.** You can't have any strategy or plan for applying to college until you know where you are going to apply. Your list should be pretty much final by July 15 following your junior year. At that point, you'll have a good sense of your admissions profile and you should be able to make realistic choices.
- 8. Commit to spend the month before your senior year doing nothing but completing college applications.** Okay, sure, it cuts into your summer. But really truly, it will save you so much pain and agony. You should start senior year with a good number of your applications ready to go. Write as many of the college essays as possible in August before you return for senior year.
- 9. Sweat the details.** Read the fine print carefully and multiple times. It is YOUR job to know the details, no one else's.
- 10. Beat the application deadlines by at least a week, and even better if by two weeks.** If the deadline for submission is January 1, submit your application no later than December 15. Follow up after submission to confirm that each application was deemed “complete.”